

Why Alabama is on the right Trail

ONE of my favorite places to go play golf is right next door to me in Alabama – The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. From one end of the state to the other you can find some wonderful golf.

I have always said that The Trail, as it is called, is one of the best marketing ideas I have ever seen. Alabama has done it right! They knew who to get to design the courses and bring golfers to a state that no one would ever think of going to to play golf.

As you know the Mona Lisa has worn that same, silly little smirk of a smile for more than 500 years. The farmer portrayed in the painting 'American Gothic' is still holding on to the same pitchfork. Equally, Venus de Milo, The Thinker, the Sistine Chapel and other great works of art created years ago share a common thread today. They are masterpieces.

A more modern work of art uses the same ideas for its base as the classic works of art. The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail, much like the aforementioned works, used bold strokes to produce a work based in simplicity.

It, too, is a masterpiece. But unlike the classics, the Trail isn't afraid to tweak its work, seeking to make it even more beautiful while maintaining the challenges and integrity of the courses' original work and idea. ►



Doug Hollandsworth says that The Robert Trent Jones Trail is one of golf's best marketing ideas



The Highlands course at Huntsville's Hampton Cove (top) and the eighth hole on the Heartbreaker course at Silver Lakes.

And so it has. With recent renovations to The Crossings Course at Mobile's Magnolia Grove, the Ridge Course at Birmingham's Oxmoor Valley and The Highlands Course at Huntsville's Hampton Cove, the Trail has altered its original work and come away with a new look; more bold strokes fashioned to present a work of beautiful simplicity, which has been the backbone of the Trail since its inception.

Dr. David G. Bronner, CEO of the Retirement Systems of Alabama, was searching for an idea that would bring new industry to the state of Alabama while also improving the lives of its citizens.

"We wanted to change the image of the state," Dr. Bronner said. "The Trail has done that. A lot of people would never have come to Alabama if it hadn't been for the Trail. It has changed the perception of Alabama. The adage, 'bad news travels and good news stays at home', holds some truth."

Good news, in the form of the Trail, traveled, and traveled quickly. Many thought Dr. Bronner's idea of a golf trail throughout the state foolish at best. Others suggested the idea would be a huge failure and end up being just more bad news. They were wrong.

"The most important part of the Trail is that it has attracted industry to Alabama and as such, has helped create tens of thousands of jobs," Dr. Bronner said. "Many people in the state are working for those industries now and are in jobs paying \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year."

In retrospect, Dr. Bronner said the Trail "turned out a lot better than I had hoped." He said the beauty of the Trail can be seen every day at each of the 11 sites. The Trail's beauty not only is aesthetic, but "it's beautiful because we went into the woods and created something," he said. "It also has a philosophical beauty."

Prior to the Trail, Dr. Bronner said, state tourism was worth \$1.8 billion. That figure grew to \$9.6 billion after the Trail. While the courses offer challenges and opportunities for golfers, it



is what the Trail has provided for the citizens of Alabama that most pleases Dr. Bronner.

The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail is an original, a masterpiece of golf design and play that has lifted the image and corporate profile of the state of Alabama and provided an improved quality of life for its citizens.

If it were possible, it's the kind of achievement that would make Mona Lisa break into a full-bore grin. I guess that is one reason they have two LPGA events at The Trail each year!

Until our next issue, safe golf travels.

► For more information, go to www.rtjgolf.com or call 1-800-949-4444.

Thanks to Tommy Hicks for some of this research.



Tell Doug

I would love to hear from you about any travel trips you have been on or any questions you might have, so please email me at
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The Ridge course at Birmingham's Oxmoor Valley (left) and, below, the fourth hole on the Judge course at Capitol Hill.

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